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US House Races Take Shape: AL, GA & LA

More primaries, runoffs and filing deadlines have come and gone in three states -- Alabama, Georgia and Louisiana -- setting up a number of competitive congressional contests this fall. Here's a rundown.

Alabama: Favorites Win Runoffs

State Rep. **John Love** (R) and **Wayne Parker** easily won the GOP congressional nominations in Alabama's July 15 runoffs.

2nd District (Dothan, etc.)

State Rep. **John Love** won a close but decisive victory over state Sen. **Harri Anne Smith**. With 99% of the precincts reporting, Love had 25,124 votes (53%) to 22,404 (47%) for Smith. In the first primary on June 3, Love came in first in a six-candidate race with 35% to Smith's 22%. Despite Love's financial contributions from GOP congressional leaders in Washington, Smith actually out-raised Love, \$170,000 to \$150,000 during the period from May 15 to June 25. However, Love had more cash on hand, \$160,000 to \$100,000. In addition, Love has personal resources.

House Minority Leader **John Boehner** (OH) and US Rep. **Tom Cole** (OK), chairman of the

National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), intervened financially in the runoff on Love's behalf. Smith, in turn, campaigned as the outsider and not part of the Washington establishment. The runoff campaign got heated, leading retiring 16-year veteran US Rep. **Terry Everett** (R) to call on the two candidates to cool it; both of them then pulled their negative ads.

Love will face Montgomery Mayor **Bobby Bright** (D) in November in what is likely to be a hotly contested race that could go either way but for now **Leans Republican**.

5th District (Huntsville, etc.)

Businessman (insurance) **Wayne Parker**, who came within a whisker of election to Congress in 1994, handily defeated attorney **Cheryl Baswell Guthrie** for the GOP nomination to replace retiring nine-term US Rep. **Bud Cramer** (D). With 97% of precincts reporting, Parker garnered 16,028 votes (79%) to Guthrie's 4,330 (21%). Parker had been heavily favored. In addition to national support, as noted, he almost won in the June 3 primary, coming in first in a six-way race with 49% of the vote, to Guthrie's 18%.



In the money chase, Guthrie did a good job, raising \$150,000 to Parker's \$120,000, although Parker had \$50,000 on hand as of June 25 to Guthrie's \$5,000. As in the 2nd District, Boehner and Cole got involved in the runoff, helping Parker. In addition, Parker received a contribution from Chief Deputy Minority Whip **Eric Cantor** (R-VA).

In November, Parker will face state Sen. **Parker Griffith** (D) in another highly contested race. While this is one of the GOP's few opportunities -- in the South or in the nation -- to pick up a seat currently held by the Democrats, recent trends suggest it **Leans Democratic**.

Georgia: Incumbents Rule

Despite several significant challenges in Georgia's July 15 primaries, incumbents in both parties easily won renomination. The totals reflect 96% of precincts reporting.

5th District (Atlanta)

Eleven-term **John Lewis** (D), under attack by challengers for his early support for **Hillary Clinton**, won a solid victory over two challengers. Lewis had 32,097 votes (69%) to **Markel Hutchins**'s 7,374 (16%) and "**Able**" **Mable Thomas**'s 6,989 (15%).

10th District (Athens, etc.)

Freshman **Paul Broun** (R-GA) easily turned back a well-financed challenge from state House Minority Leader **Barry Fleming** in the July 15 Republican Primary. Broun had 44,859 (71%) to Fleming's 18,334 (29%).

12th District (Augusta to Savannah)

In the Democratic Primary, second-term US Rep. **John Barrow** (D) defeated state Sen. **Regina Thomas** by 43,490 (76%) to 13,638

(24%). Barrow is white, Thomas is black and the primary electorate was a majority black. **Barack Obama** appeared in a commercial for Barrow. On the GOP side, ex-congressional aide **John Stone** won the primary with 9,475 (57%) to **Ray McKinney**'s 5,335 (32%) and **Ben Crystal**'s 11%. The primary totals -- 57,128 (D) to 16,725 (R) -- indicate this one is **Likely Democratic**.

Louisiana: Filing Deadline Passes

Louisiana's filing deadline for the fall elections ended Friday, July 11, setting competitive primaries and/or general election contests for the US Senate and in four congressional districts. Party primaries will be held on Sept. 6, followed by runoffs on Oct. 4. Only registered Republican can vote in the GOP primary, while registered Democrats and independents can vote in the Democratic Primary. The General Election is Nov. 4.

2nd District (New Orleans)

Seven candidates, each with significant political credentials, have filed to run against indicted nine-term US Rep. **William Jefferson** (D): **James Carter**, a New Orleans city councilman; **Troy Carter**, a former state representative and former New Orleans city councilman, who will be strong in the Algiers part of the district; **Jimmy Fahrenholtz**, member of the New Orleans school board; **Byron Lee**, member of the Jefferson Parish Council; **Helena Moreno**, an attractive former TV anchor (seven years); state Rep. **Cedric Richmond**, a leader in the Legislative Black Caucus, whose strength overlaps Jefferson's; and **Kenya Smith**, a former aide to Mayor **Ray Nagin** (D).

Given that many in Jefferson's family have become ensnared in the same bribery case that involves Jefferson, "the outlook for him is not



good,” says Louisiana pollster **Bernie Pinsonat**. However, he could end up in a runoff where he would have an advantage. If, for example, he comes up against Moreno, who should have wide appeal to the district’s white voters, Jefferson could run well in this 64% black district. In the General Election, the Democratic nominee will face nominal opposition from Republican, Libertarian and Green Party contenders. **Safe Democratic.**

3rd District (Morgan City, etc.)

No Republican filed against two-term US Rep. **Charlie Melancon** (D), leaving the Democrat free to spend his political energies helping other Democrats in Louisiana’s competitive congressional races. **Safe Democratic.**

4th District (Shreveport, etc.)

Paul Carmouche, district attorney for Caddo Parish (Shreveport), drew only weak Democratic Primary opposition from two former candidates for the seat, which is being vacated by ten-term US Rep. **Jim McCrery** (R). In addition, the failure of African-American state Sen. **Lydia Jackson** (D) to file, either in the primary or as an independent, gives Carmouche an additional boost. Carmouche “is such a moderate, popular Democrat that he’s very likely to get some longstanding business support out of Shreveport,” says a lobbyist. Nevertheless, the GOP is gearing up to make a major effort to hold this seat. Three candidates, each with significant pluses, have filed in the Republican Primary: Physician **John Fleming**; businessman (trucking) **Chris Gorman**, who started his campaign early; and **Jeff Thompson**, lawyer and former local chamber of commerce official who has the support of McCrery. Bush got 59% here in 2004. **Leans Republican.**

6th District (Baton Rouge)

When former state Rep. and long time conservative leader **Woody Jenkins** (R) announced that he would not be a candidate for the full term of this congressional seat, the smart money smelled a new contest altogether. Jenkins, a controversial conservative, lost to now-US Rep. **Don Cazayoux** (D) in a special election in May. Moreover, another likely contender, **Laurinda Calongne** (R), who made the runoff with Jenkins, also announced that she will not run. That left the GOP field to physician and state Sen. **Bill Cassidy** (R), who has the backing of the state Republican establishment -- including Gov. **Bobby Jindal** and probably Jenkins as well, and is expected to run a strong race. There may also be some business defections from Cazayoux over his endorsement by unions, although he is pro-life and pro-gun, both key issues here. Add to this new-found GOP unity that the Democrats are not so united. Moderate state Rep. **Michael Jackson**, who lost the Democratic runoff (43% to 57%) to Cazayoux in the special election, filed to run again as a “no party affiliation” candidate in the General Election. African-American Jackson might divert enough black votes from Cazayoux to elect Cassidy.

The Democratic Party’s voter registration drive has made a major impact among black voters here. According to Baton Rouge’s *The Advocate*, a record high 15,485 new voters registered in East Baton Rouge Parish in the first six months of the year; 63% of these are African Americans. Of the total new registrants, 63% are Democrats, 15% Republicans and 22% other, including “no party.” With Jackson in the race, the value of these numbers to Cazayoux is less clear. However, Cazayoux now has the power of incumbency. All things considered, the district now **Leans Republican.**



7th District (Lafayette, etc.)

State Sen. **Don Cravins, Jr.** (D), a moderate African-American Democrat, is expected to give two-term US Rep. **Charles Boustany** (R) a significant challenge, especially if the national Democratic trend shows up in Louisiana (and why shouldn't it?). Cravins, says pollster Pinsonat, "is going to make [Boustany] work, but is he going to beat him? I don't think so." Although Cravins is a plaintiffs' attorney, one close observer of Pelican State politics says that he is, "is not all like his father, who was anti-business." The elder Cravins is former state Sen. **Don Cravins, Sr.**, who ran a strong but losing race for this seat in 2004. Cravins, Jr., also gets points for his work on Hurricane Katrina issues from his positions as chairman of the Senate's committee on insurance. The district is 25% black, but black voters may form a larger share of the electorate since the recent Democratic voter registration drive in the state. Moreover, the Obama candidacy is likely to increase the turnout of African-American voters, here as elsewhere. Boustany is the incumbent, however, and Bush did get 60% here in 2004. "This one could be a sleeper," says a political consultant (D). For now, however, **Likely Republican.**

US Senate Updates

Georgia: Runoff (D) for Senate

In the July 15 Democratic Primary for the US Senate nomination to oppose first term US Sen. **Saxby Chambliss** (R), with 96% of precincts reporting, former DeKalb County CEO **Vernon Jones** led with 194,679 (40%) to 2006 nominee for lieutenant governor **Jim Martin**'s 165,579 (34%). Ex-TV news anchor **Dale Cardwell** had 77,627 (16%), ecologist **Rand Knight** had 25,288 (5%) and ex-US Senate aide **Josh Lanier** had 19,554 (4%).

Jones, who is African American, and Martin, who is white, will be in an August 5 runoff. Jones is favored in the runoff, Chambliss in November. **Likely Republican.**

Louisiana: Kennedy Draws Primary Foe

Two-term US Sen. **Mary Landrieu** (D) drew no opponents in the Democratic Primary, but her Republican challenger, State Treasurer **John N. Kennedy**, will face an opponent, **Jacques Boudreaux**, a landscape contractor and political novice, in the GOP primary. Boudreaux is unlikely to offer serious competition to Kennedy, but he may make him spend at least a little money he'd rather save for the November race. Landrieu has been leading in the polls, but not by much. **Leans Democratic.**

Can Obama Win Georgia?

The short answer is yes. Two recent polls by SPR's parent company, InsiderAdvantage/PollPosition, show **Barack Obama** within a point or two of **John McCain** in the Peach State. In the first poll, taken June 19, McCain had 44 percent, Obama 43 percent. And in the second, taken on July 2, while Obama was airing a full-scale television campaign, the results remained essentially the same: McCain had 46 percent, Obama 44 percent. This is in the same state where **George W. Bush** beat **Al Gore** by 55 percent to 43 percent in 2000 and beat **John Kerry** by 58 percent to 41 percent in 2004.

The long answer is a little more complicated. Yes, Obama could possibly carry Georgia, but to do it, he has to fill a couple of pretty tall orders, summed up in the "thirty-thirty rule."

First, he has to boost the turnout of African-American voters to an almost unprecedented 30 percent of those who vote in the General Election. In the last presidential election, black



voters accounted for 25 percent of the turnout; in 2006, the last off-year election, the black share of the vote was 24 percent. But on February 5, 2008, when Obama was on the Democratic presidential primary ballot, African Americans did make up about 30 percent of the total vote cast in both primaries. So the first “thirty rule” may be difficult for the Obama camp, but it is not unprecedented.

Second, Obama must win 30 percent of the white votes. In 2000, Gore came close, winning 28 percent of white voters in Georgia. In 2004, Kerry got about 25 percent of whites. In the June 19 InsiderAdvantage poll, Obama got 25 percent of whites, about the same as Kerry. In this year’s Georgia presidential primaries, however, 31 percent of the state’s white voters participated in the Democratic Primary. If virtually all of them, including the **Hillary Clinton** supporters, vote for Obama in November, he might get his needed 30 percent.

These statistics suggest that a highly effective, well-financed campaign could put Obama over the top in the Peach State. However, Obama’s greatest problem in achieving the needed thirty-thirty may not lie with his own campaign as with McCain’s. Georgia Republicans are not likely to sit back and watch Obama gain the necessary votes at the margin; on the contrary, the GOP’s panoply of power in the state, including Gov. **Sonny Perdue** (R), the Republican majorities in the state’s congressional delegation, the GOP majorities in the legislature, and both the state Republican Party and the McCain organization, are likely to put their collective shoulders to the wheel to make sure the state stays in the Republican column. This means Obama will be shooting at a moving target.

In addition to the two major parties’ efforts, Obama would benefit if voters who otherwise might vote for Republican McCain marked

their ballots instead for Libertarian **Bob Barr**. In 2004, the Libertarian nominee received less than 1 percent of the Peach State vote, but Barr is a former congressman from Georgia and could do better. He got 6 percent and 4 percent in the two InsiderAdvantage surveys.

A possible fourth factor, highlighted in InsiderAdvantage’s second poll, would be the selection by Obama of Georgia’s former US Sen. **Sam Nunn** (D) as the Democratic vice presidential nominee. While Nunn, 70, is no longer a household name after being out of office since 1997, some 51 percent of Georgia voters say they would be more likely to vote for Obama if Nunn, an expert on national defense, were on the ticket. Nunn may be a long-shot -- the Democratic left has already begun to decry the possibility. However, Nunn recently signaled a willingness to compromise on the military’s anti-gay “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy which he engineered and which soured many gays and Democratic liberals on him. Though he did not specifically call for revising DADT, in early June Nunn called for “a second look” at the policy.

InsiderAdvantage CEO **Matt Towery**, an experienced observer of -- and for a time a participant in -- Georgia politics, said in commenting on the June 19 poll that his state “will remain a major new battleground state through November,” adding, “This changes the landscape of electoral politics as Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and perhaps another surprise Southern state, join Florida as potential ‘swing states’ that cannot be presumed to vote Republican.”

In sum, the new, hard-fought race in Georgia is a victory for Obama either way -- a big victory if he carries the state, a considerably smaller but not insignificant victory if he manages to make McCain work and spend to keep one of his key base states in his column.



Grits

? **Zogby: Dixie a Major Battleground.** In fifty state surveys, Zogby polls found that the South is not a GOP base, but a series of close contests. **John McCain** was ahead, though mostly not comfortably, in Alabama (by 11 points), Florida (4), Georgia (6) Kentucky (5), Louisiana (7), Oklahoma (5), Tennessee (5) and Texas (3). **Barack Obama** led, often narrowly, in Arkansas (2), North Carolina (9), South Carolina (1) and Virginia (5). Some of these results are counter-intuitive. Stay tuned.

? **Barr Spoiling Dixie for McCain?** Zogby's state surveys showed that Libertarian nominee **Bob Barr**, a former Republican congressman from Georgia, had a negative impact on McCain in several Southern states. In North Carolina, Obama had a 47% to 38% lead, with Barr getting 4%, enough that -- were it added to McCain's total -- would make the Tar Heel State more competitive. And in Virginia, Zogby showed Obama with a 44% to 39% lead over McCain, with Barr pulling 5%, which otherwise might help McCain tie the race. In addition, two recent polls in Georgia, taken by InsiderAdvantage/Poll Position, SPR's parent company, showed McCain with a slim two or three point lead, with Barr pulling 4% in one survey and 6% in the other, enough to give McCain a more comfortable lead.

? **NRCC Raising Money for Diaz-Balarts.** Among the latest beneficiaries of the National Republican Congressional Committee's (NRCC) Regain Our Majority Program (ROMP) are three Floridians, brothers **Mario Diaz-Balart** and **Lincoln Diaz-Balart**, and **Tom Feeney**, as well as Texan **Pete Olson**, who is seeking to reclaim **Tom DeLay**'s old seat. The committee, says *The Hill* newspaper, is hosting a fundraiser in Washington

to help these and other new members of ROMP. Meanwhile, a poll shows the Diaz-Balart brothers each with a skimpy lead. Lincoln Diaz-Balart led former Hialeah Mayor **Raul Martinez** (D) 41% to 37%, and Mario Diaz-Balart led former Dade County Democratic Chairman **Joe Garcia** by 44% to 39%. In the 18th District (Miami), nine-term US Rep. **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R) had a 58% to 31% lead over challenger **Annette Taddeo** (D). The surveys were taken by Florida's Bendixen & Associates, which has many Democratic clients, but none in these contests.

? **Tennessee: Blackburn in a Real Race?** Shelby County Register of Deeds **Tom Leatherwood** (R), who is challenging 3rd-term US Rep. **Marsha Blackburn** in the August 7 Republican primary, released a poll taken for him June 28-29 showing Blackburn with a tepid-for-an-incumbent 48% to 37% lead over Leatherwood. A Blackburn campaign staffer told *The Hill* newspaper that the pollster serves on Leatherwood's finance committee. Blackburn, meanwhile, has been endorsed by two conservative powerhouses, the National Federation of Independent Business and the National Rifle Association.

? **Kentucky: Libertarian or Libertine?** Senate Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (R) may have a serious challenge from Louisville millionaire **Bruce Lunsford** (D), but the presence of Libertarian **Sonny Landham**, an actor -- "Big Bear" in 1982 hit movie "48 Hours" -- may not divert many votes from McConnell. That's because Landham, now 67, has 'fessed up that some 30 years ago he appeared in pornographic movies, joking to *The Washington Post* that the old films revealed his "shortcomings." He thinks that makes him colorful, but this Bible State's voters -- unlike SPR -- may not be amused.